

## **National Consultative Assembly, 21<sup>st</sup> Term**

Two years after the dissolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly, the next legislature took office in October 1963. During the two-year interval, the policies of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi triggered events which set the cornerstone for national struggles leading to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

In the absence of a parliament, the government adopted the so-called State and Provincial Association Law which introduced three amendments to the Iranian Constitution: 1. Dropping the requirement for potential MPs to be Muslim 2. Dropping oath on the Quran and replacing it with the oath on religious texts 3. Granting women right to vote.

This coincided with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's successorship to Ayatollah Hossein Tabatabaei Boroujerdi as the supreme authority on religious matters. A new phase of anti-Shah struggles started.

Imam Khomeini, along with a group of religious scholars, signed letters of protests to the Shah and Prime Minister Assadollah Alam to have the aforesaid law annulled.

Despite such opposition, the Shah moved in January 1963 to put to public vote his principles for the so-called White Revolution. That was his scheme to accomplish reforms he had embarked on earlier. The referendum was held on January 26, 1963 against the backdrop of Imam Khomeini's call for boycotting the plebiscite. (Sabeti, 2011: 111-112)

The persistence of public protests led by Imam Khomeini led to tough suppression and killing of clerics at Feizieh seminary in Qom in March 1963, which set the stage for the June 5, 1963 uprising. The significance of this national uprising was in its preparation of intellectual and cultural ground for the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Two months after the uprising, Prime Minister Alam organized legislative elections. The election process was different this time as the electorate was required to get electoral cards for Election Day. Opponents insisted that it was a tactic for keeping the government's interference with the election process in the dark. (Madani, 2009:79)

Furthermore, in a bid to introduce state-backed candidates to people, the Alam government resorted to the Congress of Free-Thinking Men and Women. This Congress named a five-member board to release the list of Iran Nation candidates for the Consultative Assembly and 30 candidates for the Senate.

Since all those names had the endorsement of the government state-backed hopefuls were elected across Iran. (Asgari, 2007: 395)

An outstanding feature of this round of election was that influential land proprietors and former MPs were not elected and most lawmakers were new. Apart from that, six women were elected to the Assembly for the first time in history. The number of parliamentarians reached 193 after amendments to Election Law in 1960. The tally was announced one day after Election Day. (Abadian, 2004: 280-284)

Abdollah Riazi, head of the Engineering Faculty of the University of Tehran, was elected speaker of parliament. He remained in this post for 15 years when the 24<sup>th</sup> and last National Consultative Assembly was elected before the Islamic Revolution.

In terms of age, MPs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Assembly were younger than before as nearly 77% of them were aged between 30 and 50. That indicated the regime's decision to replace veteran

politicians with new faces. Nearly 78% of the deputies were first-time legislators. In terms of academic degree, 67% of them held a university degree, up from the 48% share in the former Assembly. Naturally, due to the surge in public and administrative bodies, nearly 60% of MPs were civil servants. (Basirimanesh & Mansouri, 2016: 169)

A group of clerics led by Imam Khomeini protested to the election process and the Central Council of National Front boycotted the vote. Consequently, the parliament was dominated by two blocs. The Modern Iran party controlled the Assembly. The Modern Iran party had been established in 1953 by Center for Progress led by Hassan-Ali Mansour. The center had been set up two years earlier by a group of Iranian university graduates in the US. Modern Iran managed to win 175 seats. The other political faction with representatives in parliament was Peoples Party with 16 deputies. (Saremi, Shahab, 1999: 95-128)

The National Front and Tudeh Party had been banned in Iran due to internal differences and tough restrictions imposed by the Shah regime. Meantime, revolutionary groups were formed in secret, most of them taking up arms. Some of them were Islamic Coalition, Islamic Nations, Mujahideen Khalq, and Fadaian Khlaq. Then prime minister Hassan-Ali Mansour was gunned down by armed revolutionaries in front of the Assembly. (Baqeri, 2014: 360-363)

Mansour won the vote of confidence in parliament after Assadollah Alam quit. Under Mansour, some decisions were taken in favor of the US to the dismay of some countries like Britain. As a result, relations between the Pahlavi regime and the British government turned sour. (Asgari, Ibid: 398)

The most important decision which infuriated the Iranian society and some other countries was the Capitulation Law which granted judicial immunity to American military advisors and acquisition of a \$200 million loan from the US for purchasing military equipment. The capitulation law was adopted by 74 votes in favor in parliament. Mansour was assassinated 100 days later and Amir Abbas Hoveyda succeeded him.

Imam Khomeini adopted a harsh stance against these two laws, declaring national mourning. He was finally forced into exile in Iraq due to his protests. (Avery, 2005: 97)

Another marking event of this term of Assembly was the botched attempt on the Shah's life at Marmar Palace. After surviving the assassination attempt, the Shah ordered the execution and imprisonment of members of Islamic Nations Party and the Iranian People Revolutionary Movement.

More than 660 laws were approved by this Assembly, including Law on Iran's Adhesion to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, law on establishment of ministries of housing, water and electricity, and information, law on establishment of Iran Statistics Center, and law on establishment of Supreme Council of Culture and Art. Most of these laws and others satisfied the Shah's White Revolution objectives. (Baqeri et al, 2014: 376)

The 21<sup>st</sup> Assembly remained in office until October 5, 1967. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Assembly was formed immediately after.

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